

Is it User Generated Content or Using Your Users as Free Labor?

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UGC: User Generated Content is *the* buzzword today as part of Web 2.0, also known as the new web. But, the real issues with UGC are to determine how it can help your brand, why it can sometimes hurt your brand, and how to get customers, consumers, and clients to interact with your brand without feeling as if you are using them.

User Generated Content: From Wikipedia to Doritos

UGC is often defined as material created by the general public rather than experts or professionals. [Wikipedia](#) is probably the gold standard of an example with a tagline that explains it all: “the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit.”

Content morphed into contests in February 2007 when Frito Lay announced that consumers could create a winning ad that would air during Super Bowl XLI. The [Doritos](#) brand picked up major web yardage and publicity with this stunt. It repeated the play in 2008 and in 2009, it dangled \$1 million to the consumer who could produce a 30-second spot that would top the *USA Today* poll for best commercial. Enter brothers [Dave and Joe Herbert](#) who captured the title, won the cash, and launched their careers.

The entire Super Bowl contest was a true win/win: the chip maker scored with first mover advantage, countless press coverage, and an ad that worked. By the same token, the winning siblings achieved a touchdown with notoriety and a huge payoff as well.

What is the Purpose of the Content?

Now, there are hundreds of copycat contenders in cyberspace. Consumers create the name, tagline, print ad, 30-second spot, and heck! It seems as if we are running the brand! [CareerBuilder](#) just launched a yawner with its dare to create a winning ad for Super Bowl 2010 and win a mere \$100,000.

But, the real question to ask is: why did CareerBuilder create the contest? Unfortunately, the answer appears to be because it fired its advertising agency, the very hot and creative Wieden + Kennedy. It is as if they are turning to the public because it refuses to pay a professional to do it and therein lies the conundrum of UGC. *At what point are you engaging your consumers and when are you simply using them as free laborers?*

You are helping your brand and its users when you actively invite feedback. You learn what's working, what's not, and even uncover ideas for new products and brand extensions. Intuit, for example, actively encourages feedback in a never-ending quest for product improvement. Its [Inner Circle](#) program for Turbo Tax wins kudos for capturing user input that in the end benefits both parties.

Given the myriad uses for WD-40, its [Fan Club](#) is a natural on-line extension for consumers to share stories, tips, and suggestions.

How to Make it Work For You?

1. **Invite Feedback All The Time** - Even if your site is not yet equipped with extensive uploading capability, make it clear that you welcome input. Have numerous "tell us what you think" "submit a suggestion" or "contact us" forms to begin the dialogue.
2. **Don't Limit Yourself to Just Video** - I believe too many companies today see UGC as UGV: User Generated Video; they have forgotten the power of words and still photos. Limiting contests, applications, and submissions only to videos ultimately limits your pool of participation. Let me ask you this: *when was the last time you submitted a video application?* Please [let me know](#).
3. **Use It Fairly** - if you are truly looking for a new brand name, tagline, commercial, or other creative outlet, reward the winner appropriately. Winning a year's worth of mints, for example, hardly seems appropriate remuneration.

Until next week.....Liz

Meet Liz Goodgold



Speaker and author Liz Goodgold is considered a fireball of energy with over 25 years of experience in marketing and branding. She is the author of [RED FIRE BRANDING: Create a Hot Personal Brand and Have Customers for Life](#) and [DUH! Marketing](#).

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